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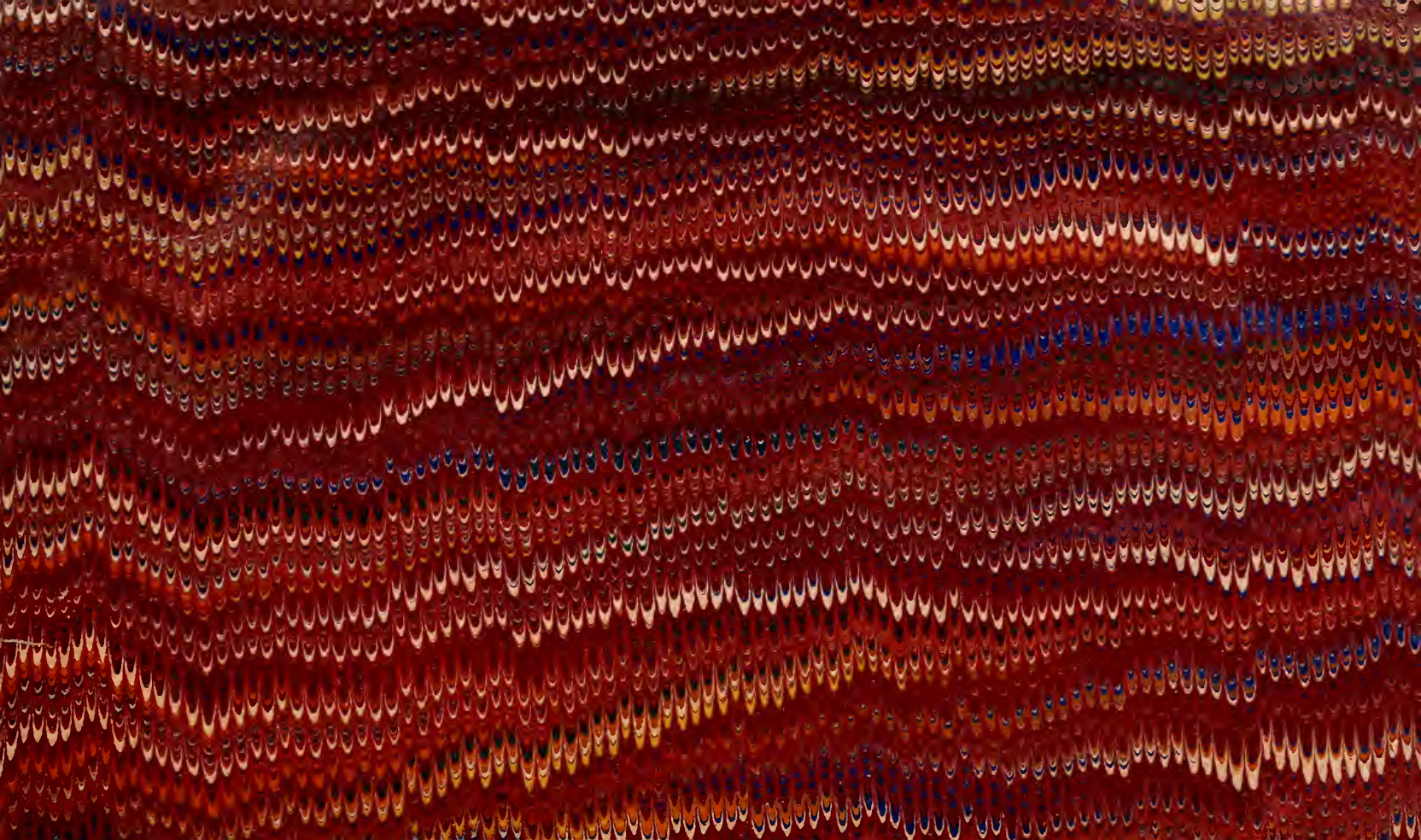

THE MEMORIAL OF VIRTUE:

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN THE WEST CHURCH, JAN. 22, 1865,

After the Death

OF

EDWARD EVERETT.

By C. A. BARTOL.

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15, Water Street.

SERMON.

"The memorial thereof is immortal." — Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 1.

The question whether we should care for reputation or posthumous renown, we need not debate. It is settled in our constitution. The breath is no sooner out of a man's body than we consider his career to decide his character. *The present condition of his spirit*, I heard proposed for discussion respecting a distinguished deceased person, on the very day when he died.

Virtue is her own supreme motive; but what may be said of our conduct re-enforces virtue that is not quite strong enough, as with most of us it is not, to go alone. So the guileless Charles Lamb quaintly speaks of the delight of doing good by stealth, and having it found out by accident; and the strong-willed Andrew Jackson declared, that, looking into his heart for the brave deed, he also believed all brave men would approve it. So the memorial of virtue, wherever may stand its living record of the

human soul, is the true scripture and only holy book. With what a thrill we follow that famous succession of short but great eulogies, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, of Abraham and Moses and Joseph and the rest! Over the Old-Testament stories of Adam and Cainan and Jared, which we peruse with a dogged perseverance, from an inherited sense of the duty of reading the Bible through, — when we come to Enoch, why are we startled? Because, of all those mentioned before, it is only written, that they lived so many hundreds of years, and "begat sons and daughters;" but of Enoch it is added, that "he walked with God." This makes his title in every letter venerable, till history be no more. We are informed in Genesis of many "dukes." Why do we know nothing about them but their names? Because by no excellence were they, any more than a thousand modern dukes, embalmed in the recollection of their race. Teman, Zepho, Kenaz, and Gatam are forgotten: Abel, dead long before them, is remembered still.

What will be told of us, after we are gone? The date of our birth and death, our parentage and genealogical tree, the descent of our estate and blood; but beyond these inferior, transitory trifles, our worth, if we have any, will be the main thing in the mouths of men, bad men and good men alike. It was the Roman centurion, the agent in Christ's crucifixion, with the sword in his hand, that gleamed over and

guarded the dreadful doom, who cried out, "Certainly this was a righteous man." "A good name *is* better than precious ointment," and it should be prized.

> "For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
> This pleasing, anxious being e'er resigned,
> Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
> Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?"

Even where the blaze of transcendent genius eclipses details of conduct, and streams down an aurora to all ages, our persuasion is, that the author of the divine sentences, syllabled for ever in the air, must have been a good man. Without goodness, talent has no crown. It can hardly amount to genius, or but to genius not of the highest order, or only of a wayward and flitting sort. I think Galileo loses more by his recanting, than he gains by his discovery of the earth's motion. "I would rather have the regard of my neighbors," said a New-England poet, "than the fame of Shakspeare." "I would rather have written Watts's Hymns," said the holy man, your former minister, "than the plays of Shakspeare." The account of some men, like the geological record, is imperfect. But it has been said, not any man's genius, but only his character, what he wills to be, is immortal. His genius *may* be an accident of his organization, like his temperament, complexion, or tone of voice. His virtue will live for ever. If blind old Homer carried his harp from door to door, or Shakspeare entertained the poor players at his board, the mercy and hospitality

were of more account with God than the music and the poetry; though I cannot but think these, too, as more than earthly endowments, will, in their possessors, re-appear on the morning of the resurrection, and survive for ever.

These remarks have been suggested by the bereavement which Boston and the nation have just been called to meet. If I did not believe the eminent fellow-citizen, in the shadow of whose death, day after day, we walk, to have been a good man, for no lustre of his intellectual distinction would I pronounce his panegyric, world-wide as its resounding will be. Of his mental accomplishments there will be no query. Though not a poet or philosopher, neither imaginatively creative, nor metaphysically close-grained in his writing, he was the prince of scholars and rhetoricians, a luminous adorner of all truth. He was one of the number of singular individuals born into the world, whose mould is used but once, and then broken; without peer or parallel in his precise quality. There has been, there could be, but one Edward Everett. But deeper than his special gifts of learning and reflective power, or all the graces that hung round him, lay the rare kindness he had not full credit for. It was hid somewhat beneath his grave and solemn mien. The applauded man seemed very solitary; in a centre of admirers rather than a cluster of friends. He was a monumental man, whom

one surveyed with a cool enthusiasm, and hesitated to approach with familiarity, till his self-enclosure was found to be but a tender-hearted shyness and modesty, not pride or intentional distance. Perhaps he appeared so much away from us, by his dwelling in the past. His recollection held so much, it seemed less the faculty of an individual than the memory of mankind. Like a huge ship, he was steady with the weight he bore; yet that ruddy cast of his complexion lacked not a tremulous natural sensibility. His pace in the street appeared as remote as a planetary revolution, in our cool, telescopic view; yet, if one joined him, nothing could exceed the benignity and freedom of his instructive communications, in a courtesy as humane as it was exquisite, and as genuine as it was abundant. He is the only person I ever knew, who always acknowledged the sending to him even of a pamphlet. He had not the native force of passion that may come in aid of philanthropy, to stiffen at once and kindle the reformer. Defective self-reliance, with excessive deference to others, kept him from heading and leading an unpopular cause, when he had no want of benevolence more than braver men. He could not rush to be the captain of a forlorn hope. It was not in him. God did not put it in him. But his caution, if not large-sighted, was conscientious. He wished and needed to feel the ground under him. Perhaps he hesitated because, by way of circumspec-

tion rather than prophetic vision, he saw so much, — possibly more than some who were before him in their word or deed.

He has been complained of as long deaf to the cry of the oppressed among us. I count it a great virtue to have been antislavery from the beginning. But it is not the only virtue. Some, who were so, were faulty otherwise; and some, not actively so, — being hindered by Constitutional scruples, — were virtuous otherwise. Else we should have a great many bad men, more than we should well know how to live with. Mr. Everett was not an early abolitionist; whether delayed by a fastidious taste, or willingness to compromise from fear of offence, or by sense of legal duty, or by apprehension of the blood to which Mr. Webster, so long ago as he was in England, is reported, when urged in conversation, to have said the matter must come; though of that blood none could foresee the precious sum. But, if he sometimes marched slowly when the object was grand, he never moved at all when it was mean; while no man has done more to promote that education which is the insurance of every worthy enterprise, and without which no beneficent undertaking has any basis, and no civilization or freedom can stand. The good seed itself, springing up in a quick-conceiving soil, soon sadly withers away. Human knowledge must deepen the ground even for God's word. If he valued wealth

and worldly advantages, who has been more conspicuously unselfish to employ them for the common welfare? What an almoner he has been, creating the charities he dispensed! Nobly he stood self-appointed treasurer, chancellor of the exchequer for the patriotism and pity of the time. When I think of him, what comes before me is not the governor, senator, ambassador, secretary, or college-president; but the traveller, night and day, in cold and wet, summer or winter, in his old age, through the United States, to coin his own golden accents into the Washington fund, — the purveyor of subsistence for the sufferers of Tennessee, the pleader for a Sailors' Home, the advocate of "Christian retaliation" on our rebellious foes. If he looked too much to the impression he made, that must be pardoned to an orator. Oratory, being an appeal to the instantaneous verdict of the crowd, tempts whoever can wield its incomparable arts, — the wondrous weapons that vanquish without violence or pain, — to vanity and subserviency. It becomes sometimes a moral jugglery to entertain and deceive people with, or an instrument of revenge to which sympathetic hearers can be ready coadjutors; and this is the worse side of the two. But there was no hate or falsehood in him. If in his good nature he ever flattered anybody, he never resented or retorted insult or wrong. I suppose no speaker, that appeared so frequently, succeeded so

invariably; and no one in the prime of his days could gather to the sound of his lips such an audience throughout the country as he, at threescore and ten: as I am assured by his early hearers no voice of these generations was so sweet as that of his young classic manhood. Yet this sensitive, seductive, intoxicating element, of air alive, and throbbing with his own re-echoed words, while he could not escape the praise in it he may have enjoyed, he notably turned, even on show-occasions, in practical directions. As it was said of Walter Scott, that he was a benefactor simply by the uncorrupting pleasure from his books, what a delight for millions has been Mr. Everett's speech! But not the *elegance*, which has been specified of his address, should be emphasized so much as its consecration to all good ends; especially, let us all with grateful emotion say, to the union, re-union, freedom, and perpetual peace of this so long-distracted land. Call him backward? Who has met the present crisis with a more burning zeal? He has been cold, has he? Yes, like Mount Hecla, in Iceland, quiet and frost-bound while biding its time; but, when the season for an eruption came, naturalists tell us, one of the most furious volcanoes in the world, as it flamed and poured its own molten bowels through its hoary top of eternal snow! So the gray head of Edward Everett, uplifted to the universal gaze, shook and warmed in some passages with the outbreak and tor-

rent of his patriotic appeals, which had of angry invective no spark, of personal malignity not one lava-drop.

He culminated at his close. His grand climacteric was not at thirty or forty or fifty, but seventy. It is getting in these days to be the grand climacteric of others besides him! Age is accepted as an apology for rest. But, in his case, the veteran tree ceased not bearing because it had been prematurely fruitful as a slender slip. The idea of precocity all had of him at the outset was contradicted in the end, by there being no corresponding compensatory decline! He grew as long as if he had grown ever so tardily. What he effected, only a prodigious, never-remitted industry can explain. For a reward of his diligence, he waxed to the last, and did not wane when with sudden beauty he set.

"No pale gradations quenched his ray."

He departed, being translated, "and was not; for God took him." He died *ascending*, as the day-star rises for ever, only seeming to go down, and makes the Orient where itself is. His last compositions are the strongest in style as in principle. He concluded, holding forth the righteousness and truth with whose preaching he began.

Mr. Everett's character from childhood up was touched by no wilful transgression. It had in it

nothing of grossness or flaw. He must be reckoned one of the great men whose private as his public behavior is without stain. His purity was a logical result. He was a Christian believer. He was a constant, some might say old-fashioned, morning and afternoon public worshipper. He refused, in the West, it is stated, to see Sunday callers, on the ground that he was getting ready to go to church. His morality, more than conventional, held him strictly to every obligation he knew, and made him an example to young and old. He was the converter of conservative men. He wrought for the right in quarters no other man could reach. He admitted his own mistakes with matchless magnanimity. His was not the stuff for hero or martyr, but a rare combination of blameless traits. Not sublimity or glory, but serene proportion, was his mark. He had the balance in which virtue is said to consist. Spots on the sun I care not to point out. They are not in the sun's substance, but in his atmosphere and our eyes: so our censures are often in our conceptions, and touch not the soul.

Of all Mr. Everett did and said, *finish* is the descriptive word; and death, as if respecting in him this peculiar property, came to him not untimely, but when his work was done, and a perfect finish on his life. Seldom have attributes and actions so uniformly rounded as his, with no angle to fix the eye, made an impression so strong.

With much form and many words, in Europe and America, the decease of our illustrious countryman will be observed. But its best celebration was the quickness with which it was known; as if on all at once a cloud had risen, or the evening twilight fell. It was noticed how long was the *cortége* that bore his body to the burial. But the tens of thousands of specators, "old men and maidens, young men and children," lining the chilly streets, were the true procession. Not to commemorate transcendent intelligence, but extraordinary service, the bier was thronged, the bells tolled, the cannon pealed, the arms were reversed, public offices closed, the flags half-mast, business stopped, and the mournful melodies, to hush other noises, played. A man had gone of the few whom no one is inclined to reproach.

From earthly sleep, he went to the great rest. He awoke to find himself with God. The morning broke on him, of time and eternity both. His sabbath-day's journey was but a step to heaven. The religion he defended in his youth, and made the law of his life, was his refuge from death. A path ran for him how clear over the shadowy valley into the kingdom of light! Let us so follow as to reach the same destiny, and, through the dark of nature, find *our* way home.

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